

Page 1, after line 8, insert the following heading:

--2. Description of the Related Art--

Page 2, after line 2, insert the following heading:

--SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION--

Page 3, after line 13, insert the following heading:

--DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS--

**IN THE CLAIMS:**

Original claim 1 was amended during Chapter II proceedings by substituting new claim 1 in a letter dated October 19, 2000. Please cancel original claims 1-11 and cancel amended claim 1 and rewrite them as new claims 12-27 as follows.

--12. A mineral wool plant substrate comprising a coherent matrix of mineral wool and up to 20 volume % of an ion-exchange agent comprising an ion-exchange capacity of at least about 15 meq/100g dry weight, wherein the ion-exchange agent has a stable structure, exhibiting a non-clay like behaviour with respect to swelling and shrinkage.

13. The substrate according to claim 12, wherein the ion-exchange agent is a cation-exchange agent.

14. The substrate according to claim 12, wherein the ion-exchange agent comprises soil minerals.

15. The substrate according to claim 12, wherein the ion-exchange agent has a non-clay like behaviour with respect to swelling and shrinkage.

16. The substrate according to claim 12, wherein the ion-exchange agent has an average pore size smaller than the average pore size of mineral wool having a density of less than about 72 kg/m<sup>3</sup>.

17. The substrate according to claim 12, wherein the ion-exchange agent comprises a zeolite.

18. The substrate according to claim 12, further comprising an organic substance, substituting the mineral wool for up to 20 volume %.

19. The substrate according to claim 12, further comprising clay, substituting the mineral wool for up to about 20 volume %.

20. The substrate according to claim 12, for use as a growing block.

21. A growing mat comprising the substrate of claim 12.

22. A substrate comprising a coherent matrix of mineral wool, a pre-determined amount of clay and a pre-determined amount of an organic substance, substituting the mineral wool for up to 20 volume %.

23. The substrate according to claim 22, wherein the organic substance is selected from the group consisting of sphagnum and peat.